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ABSTRACT

An objective model for evaluating expository compositions is proposed in this article. The model requires that English composition instructors be cognizant of their instructional objectives and that they convey the criteria for a good essay to their students. The evaluation of compositions then is based on the manifestation of the stipulated criteria for good exposition. One implication of this model of evaluation is that it implicitly delineates the respective roles and responsibilities of the instructor and the learner. The evaluation instrument, which can be used for the evaluation of any type of written assignment, consists of an outline which breaks down various elements of expository composition and provides a numerical ranking system for their separate evaluation. (LL)

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An Objective Evaluation of Expository Essays

Thomas O. Edwards

Instructors of college composition courses have typically been baffled with the problem of evaluating students' essays. Identifying grammatical and organizational difficulties very often does not present any problems: most English or composition instructors are adept in pointing out these deficiencies to their students, but very seldom do these instructors offer constructive feedback. The written comments are usually subjective, global and holistic. These comments, as such, are what is to be expected when one is not working from an objective model of evaluation. It is precisely an objective model of evaluating expository compositions that is being proposed in this article.

Why are many composition instructors constantly in the dilemma of determining whether a given essay from a particular student represents improvement of his previous paper or not? Specifically, the question is, how does one judge progress? In order to determine progress one must operate from definite standards and objective criteria. No criteria can be established until one knows what terminal goal is desirable. In other words, for the composition instructor to adequately evaluate his students' written work, he must specify precisely the criteria for an excellent essay and evaluate from these standards rather than assign grades on the basis of propitious or unfavorable impression.

SPECIFICATION OF OBJECTIVES

Since most college students must learn to write expository essays in order to successfully master the rigorous demands of the collegiate curricula, the focus of this proposed essay evaluation model will concern the expository essay. Obviously, the students should be taught, initially, the overall organization of the essay, namely the introduction, development section, and the conclusion.

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Next, effective planning should be emphasized with the purpose of inculcating that writing is a thinking proce[illegible]hich involves the logical manipulation of one's ideas for effecti e [illegible]mmunication rather than simply an exercise in grammatical relationships. Outlining, therefore, should be presented as a mental exercise as well as a mechanical operation. Once these general areas are understood, then each of the major components of the essay should be analyzed and differentiated.

Not only should students be taught to have an introductory statement that arousesinterest in the readers, but they should also be instructed to include specifically, their thesis statement, the respective supporting ideas, and the concluding idea as part of the introduction.

The development section must present each of the substantiating ideas in a well-developed paragraph. One of the conventional methods of paragraph development may be used to elaborate or clarify the idea such as tracing the causes and examining the effects, comparing and contrasting, or providing examples and illustrations. Equally at this time, the students can be taught the use of transitional expressions within paragraphs as well as between paragraphs in order to provide logical consistency and a sequential flow of ideas. Emphasis of the thesis should remain a focal point throughout the development of the discussion paragraphs.

In concluding the essay the main points should be summarized along with a restatement of the thesis. Moreover, the conclusion should provide an intriguing thought which shows either additional insight or a further interpretation of the thesis.

CONVEYANCE OF OBJECTIVES TO STUDENT

Once these criteria are well specified, then they should be conveyed to the students. First of all, the objectives, that is the criteria for a good expository essay, should be discussed in details with the students. Secondly, a model essay, illustrating all the features of exposition, should be presented and throughly analyzed. Then sessions in supervised practice in organization and presentation should follow. After these few procedural steps, the students are now prepared to venture into writing their own essays with a good measure of success, since they know specifically what is required of them.

EVALUATION

The grading of the essay, using the model proposed, is simply a checklist for the criteria specified in the instruction for expository composition and an evaluation of the effectiveness of each section. It is important to note that this evaluation is based upon first examining the general aspects of the essay and then scrutinizing the content of specific areas. The concept of this evaluation conforms to the instructual procedures that were discussed.

Before actually scoring the essay, the instructor will check for the evidence of the outline and evaluate it. Outlining, representing the major reflection of the planning used in the organization of the essay is required, since the thinking process of writing will be haphazard without the aid of a controlling device. And it is this exact purpose, a plan or guide, that the outline fulfills.

Specifically, this form confers points if a student has an

introduction. Then the introduction is evaluated on the basis of the quality of articulation of the thesis and main points. In addition a score is given if the student has indicated his concluding idea. Next the development section of the essay is judged first by noting if there are at least three main points used to substantiate the thesis; then if there is a logical and sequential presentation of the supporting ideas; also if transitional expressions are used; and finally if one of the specific methods of paragraph development is employed. The next criterion of evaluation concerns whether a definite conclusion has been written or not. If so, points are given and if a summary of the main points as well as insight or further interpretation is included, the student receives additional points contingent upon the respective quality. As one can see, the major focus of this evaluation form concentrates on idea development; however, there is another dimension to writing which concerns the grammatical and mechanical aspects.

The students' sentence structure and grammar are considered only to a negligible degree, since these are prerequisite skills to the development of college level writing proficiency. It is assumed that students do not have severe writing deficiencies in terms of basic structural skills when one attempts to teach them expository writing. If major grammatical problems exist, they should be eliminated prior to major emphasis on expository writing. However, since writing is conceived of as a developmental skill some consideration has to be given

to grammar and sentence structure concomitantly with instructions in expository writing. Therefore, approximately one-fifth of the total evaluation is devoted to the student's use of conventional grammar.

If writing instructors use this evaluative form or a derivation thereof, they will immediately discover that they are grading their students in an objective, meaningful and constructive manner. Furthermore, these instructors will enhance their instructional effectiveness since they are able to indicate explicitly to their students the areas of deficiency within their respective expository essays. Moreover, this grading form will provide the students with a frame of reference which will serve as a feedback mechanism as well as an instructional guide. By numbers being assigned to the various components of the essay, students can readily see their relative strengths and weaknesses in their approaches to perfecting the expository essay.

All of the above considerations will eliminate the instructor's defensiveness in justifying his grade to the student; likewise the resentment of a student, who feels that he or she has written an excellent paper and yet has received a low grade based on the instructor's subjective and holistic impression, will be eradicated since the evaluative form is a more objective index of how the paper really is. The greatest asset of this form is its level of differentiation and specificity which will ultimately eliminate conflict in judgments. Its use will result in a high degree of reliability since it is based on sound objective premises.

This evaluative form, although offering many advantages, in the grading of the essays, has certain limitations. To begin with, it has

no means of evaluating the vocabulary level of the writer. Also there are no means whereby the student's knowledge of the subject matter can be assessed. However, these limitations should not be deterrents in the consideration of adopting this evaluative scheme on a wide scale.

IMPLICATIONS

In concluding, this method of evaluation has several implications for the teaching of composition. At the outset, it requires that English composition instructors be cognizant of their instructional objective. This means that they must know exactly the behavioral output required from the students. In addition, instructors must convey the criteria for a good essay to their students. The evaluation is based on the manifestation of the stipulated criteria for good exposition.

A further implication of this model of evaluation is that it implicitly delineates the respective roles of the instructor and the learner. The responsibility of the instructor is to present his material in an organized, facilitative format and to evaluate based on his presentation. The students are given a concrete guide to follow and develop in their endeavors of becoming effective, expository writers, and they know the criteria which will serve as the basis for evaluating their papers.

Finally, this evaluation instrument serves as a general model which can be the basis for generating objectivity in the evaluation of any type of written assignment. For example, an essay on critiquing(critical summary) or snythesizing can also be evaluated by devising a similar form.

NAME _____ COURSE _____ SECTION _____

INSTRUCTOR _____

		Yes	No	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor
I	Outline	5	0	5	4	3	2
II	Idea development and organization						
	A. Introductory Paragraph(s)	5	0				
	1) has thesis sentence			5	4	3	2
	2) indicates main ideas to be discussed			5	4	3	2
	3) has concluding idea			5	4	3	2
	B. Development of main points						
	1) has at least 3 main ideas			5	4	3	2
	2) presents ideas in logical order			5	4	3	2
	3) uses transitional expressions			5	4	3	2
	4) Techniques of development (uses one or more of the following in development of three main ideas:			20	15	10	7
	a) cause and effect						
	b) analogy						
	c) comparison & contrast						
	d) definition						
	e) induction						
	f) deduction						
	g) enumeration						
	h) examples or illustration						
	C. Conclusion						
	1) Has written	5	0				
	a) summarizes main points			5	4	3	2
	b) has offered interpretation and insight			5	4	3	2
III	Style						
	A. Sentence Structure						
	1) varied			5	4	3	2
	2) punctuated correctly			5	4	3	2
	B. Grammar & Usage						
	1) Correct Use of Verbs			5	4	3	2
	2) Correct Use of Pronouns			5	4	3	2

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